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ABSTRACT

Because gifted readers have instructional needs that vary greatly from the norm, curriculum planners and teachers should make plans for the gifted that are different from those for other pupils. An instructional program for gifted readers should (1) have a strong content and value emphasis, (2) group students so as to allow the gifted to relate in meaningful ways not only with other gifted pupils but also with pupils with widely different attributes, (3) provide opportunities for individual self-development, and (4) make efforts to develop higher cognitive abilities in and through reading rather than stressing systematic skill development. A total instructional program for gifted readers emphasizes various aspects in different subject areas, but vocabulary development, advanced reading skills, and literature are suggested for special attention for gifted readers, since growth in these areas can produce intellectual rewards for the gifted. A teacher who surrounds children with an active language environment and takes advantage of "teachable moments" can bring about great gains in their language growth. Curriculum committees can facilitate the process of selecting and organizing quality reading materials for gifted children by developing resource units for different age, grade, and interest levels. (HTH)

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Talented and Gifted: Forgotten Children

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Philosophically, educators have discarded the idea that being democratic means teaching every pupil the same thing in the same way. Now it is understood that democracy in teaching means providing opportunities so that all pupils have an equal opportunity to achieve according to their full potential. Being democratic to gifted children means that they, too, must receive their fair measure of special attention. To do otherwise wastes the nation's human resources.

If the gifted in today's schools are helped to achieve according to their ability, many will become tomorrow's leaders. As leaders they will greatly influence what the future holds for all of us. The gifted must not become our forgotten children.

When one refers to "gifted individuals" it is important to specify as precisely as possible who is being discussed. A widely quoted definition of gifted is the one expressed by U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sidney P. Marland in his 1971 report to Congress.

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.
>
> Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:
>
> 1. general intellectual ability.
> 2. specific academic aptitude.
> 3. creative or productive thinking.
> 4. leadership ability.
> 5. visual and performing arts.
> 6. psychomotor ability.

"Outstanding ability" and "high performance" are key phrases in this definition. Gifted children are those children who have outstanding ability

and high performance in one or more of the areas cited. Gifted readers refer to pupils who have outstanding ability and high performance in the area of reading.

Persons who are gifted in one area tend to be consistently superior in many personal and social attributes but this is not always true. One can be a gifted reader and not be gifted in other areas. Likewise, one can be gifted in some area and yet be average or below average in reading.

This paper deals with the reading needs of gifted readers. Gifted children who are average or below average in reading ability have instructional needs not unlike other children of their own age or grade. Gifted readers have instructional needs which vary greatly from the norm.

In discussing gifted readers it is important to note that a child judged to be a gifted reader in grade one is quite different than one in grade six. Obviously the age and developmental differences have to be taken into account as instructional plans are developed, but in some ways, broad principles concerning gifted readers have applicability at all levels.

General Program Consideration

If one accepts the premise that children with different needs should receive special consideration in curriculum planning and in teaching, then it is clear that curriculum workers and teachers should make plans for the gifted which are different than those for other pupils. This may or may not include some type of administrative or instructional grouping: it certainly means paying special attention to the gifted in some manner. The following are offered as guidelines for those who seek to adapt curriculum and instruction to the needs of gifted readers.

1. Instructional programs for gifted readers should include a strong content emphasis and a strong value emphasis. If one assumes that many of the gifted will gradually assume leadership positions in the society, it

will be important for them to have a knowledge and value base from which to make decisions which benefit the total society.

2. Administrative and instructional grouping should be such that the gifted relate in meaningful ways not only to other gifted pupils, but also to pupils who are widely different in many attributes, including academic ability.

3. Some portion of a program for gifted readers should provide opportunities for individual self-development. Gifted children tend to develop deep interests about specific areas of concern. Completely stifling such interests by rigid planning or grouping would be a serious mistake.

4. In programs for the gifted, considerable effort should be made to develop higher cognitive abilities in and through reading. Teachers should constantly be working in areas like critical and creative reading, divergent thinking, problem solving, decision making, and analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

5. At all levels, programs for gifted readers should be less directed toward systematic skill development than for more normally developing readers. By the time that most schools define a pupil as a gifted reader, he/she will have progressed far enough in skill development such that there is no longer any need for direct skill teaching. Many gifted readers achieve proficiency in using reading skills without the necessity of direct instruction. In fact, in almost any reading skill one wishes to delinate, gifted readers will be superior to other pupils of the same age and/or grade level.

To suggest that gifted readers do not need a typical skill development program does not mean that they cannot benefit from any direct instruction. Teachers recognize that while some of their pupils are reading very well, others are not. The natural tendency is to ignore the good readers and spend more time with those who have obvious problems. And in some ways, it is diffi-

cult to criticize such a choice. However, when teachers attempt to adapt the reading program to the needs of the gifted, they recognize that the gifted also have unique instructional needs. The needs are simply at a different level.

Specific Program Emphases

A total instructional program for gifted children emphasizes various aspects in the different subject areas, and undoubtedly certain of the emphases will be overlapping, interrelated, and/or supportive of one another. What a teacher does in teaching reading must consider the total curriculum picture, but there are certain areas which seem to be particularly suited to the reading curriculum. Vocabulary development, advanced reading skills, and literature are suggested for special attention for gifted readers.

Vocabulary Development Activities

Teachers can safely assume that gifted readers will be consistently superior to other pupils of the same age and grade level in vocabulary and language development. Nevertheless, because of the close association with general intellectual growth, encouraging growth in these areas still produces intellectual rewards for the gifted. Central to high quality thinking is the ability to express ideas with language. One can hardly think great thoughts if there is no language available to express the thoughts.

Many curriculum guides and other instructional material encourage direct instruction in vocabulary. This often takes the form of having pupils work with weekly vocabulary lists or sometimes with the direct teaching of widely used prefixes and suffixes. A certain amount of this direct teaching is desirable, but it is also important to note that language growth occurs naturally and probably most effectively when pupils meet and use lanugage in the context of meaningful activities. Heilman and Holmes, suggest, for example, that one of the best ways to expand a pupil's language facility

and thus improve his/her ability to comprehend is to do something significant with language everyday. A teacher who surrounds children with an active language environment and then takes advantage of "teachable moments" which occur regularly can make great gains in language growth. Developing vocabulary is an all day, everyday job for teachers of all grade levels and subject areas.

In their book, Smuggling Language into the Teaching of Reading, Heilman and Holmes (1972) explain numerous direct and indirect ways to help pupils expand their vocabulary knowledge. Likewise, Eisenhardt (1972) provides many practical suggestions for general language development in Applying Linguistics in The Teaching of Reading and The Language Arts. Both are good sources of creative and practical ideas for teachers of the gifted.

Advanced Reading Skills

Recent national test results seem to suggest that schools do a relatively good job with teaching word recognition and literal comprehension. It is the more complex and interrelated reading skills such as interpretative and critical reading which are not well learned by pupils. For normal developing pupils it may be that their cognitive development does not permit the type of thinking necessary for in-depth critical reading, but certainly this is not true for gifted readers. Possibly it is at this point that gifted readers need a more direct approach to skill instruction.

What is critical reading? The lack of a widely known and accepted answer to this question has probably retarded the growth of high quality teaching procedures and materials in this area. The type of definition which comes closest to being known and accepted are those that have stemmed from ideas expressed by David Russell (1963). In his view critical reading has at least three parts. They are, (1) an attitude of questioning and of suspended judgment, (2) a striving for answers through logical inquiry and systematic problem

solving, and (3) making judgments in terms of some norm, standard, or consensus. A possible fourth component is the aspect of acting upon the decision thus made, but this is an extension and use of critical reading rather than a part of it.

It can be seen that critical reading is not a simple process. It is a process that requires high level mental activity. It may be, however, that high level mental activity is not the most crucial aspect of critical reading. Making judgments according to some standard requires a strong knowledge base about the problem in question. It may not be as difficult to teach a questioning attitude or the scientific method as an approach to problem solving as it is to teach pupils to make judgments only after obtaining reliable and extensive information about a problem.

Literature Emphasis

With gifted readers needing less time for direct skill instruction than average readers, there is more time available for learning through reading. Teachers should cherish the opportunity and not let it pass without taking full advantage of it. Many gifted readers will be self motivators and read widely as a natural part of their school day; some will need encouragement and direction. All can benefit from a well planned program of reading quality literary selections.

The ability to comprehend at literal, interpretative, and critical reading levels develops in pupils as their mind develops. Pupils can hardly understand in reading that which they cannot otherwise understand. Gifted children particularly, benefit from exposure to good books which include a broad knowledge and value content. To require (or even allow) gifted children to read insipid content is a sinful waste of time and talent.

The problem of finding high quality mateterials for pupils to read is

not as great as it once was. The problem now is more one of teachers finding time to select, organize, and use that which is available. Curriculum committees can facilitate the process greatly by developing resource units for different age, grade, and interest levels. Mythology, biographies, folktales, and fables offer some interesting possibilities. Also, having pupils read widely on certain themes (such as Great Explorations or Survival) and centering discussion on the themes helps develop classification and generalization ability.

In their book, Baskin and Harris (1980) discuss a number of books which are appropriate for gifted readers. Also, The Junior Great Books Series (Dennis, 1975) presents a graded selection of classic books along with some suggestions for using them.

Summary

The point was made that since gifted readers have unique instructional needs, schools should plan direct provisions for meeting these needs. Suggested curricular emphases were vocabulary, critical reading skills, and quality literature. General guidelines for developing reading programs for gifted pupils were noted and some specific practical sources were discussed. Lack of time and money for special programs for exceptional children is a continuing problem. Nevertheless, schools should continue vigorous efforts to make special provisions for gifted readers.

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